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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000999

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: WEEKEND PROTESTS QUIET - CELLS REMOVED AS
OPPOSITION CONSIDERS NEW TACTICS

REF: TBILISI 979

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A small crowd of 1500 rallied on May 29 the day after scuffles along Rustaveli Avenue turned violent injuring 14, including eight policemen. A similarly small crowd rallied May 30; only a crowd of about 400-500 rallied May 31. Cells were cleared from Freedom Square overnight May 31 allowing traffic to move freely through it for the first time in over a month. Rustaveli Avenue remains blocked by cells in front of the parliament, but many other cells in front of the Marriott Hotel and between Parliament and Freedom Square were being removed June 1. The non-parliamentary opposition said that it would picket the Mayor's office again on June 1 and Parliament on June 2. Irakli Alasania (Alliance) made an announcement May 29 stating his willingness to engage in dialogue, indicating that early local elections could be a positive outcome. Eka Beselia (United Georgia) and Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia) stopped short of directly criticizing Alasania, but said he did not represent their views. Levan Gachechiladze called May 29 on western diplomats to give up their "indifferent" stance and stop simply repeating calls for dialogue. Former Minister of Reintegration Goga Khaindrava lambasted the Ambassador in an interview accusing him of sinister motives. Speaker David Bakradze and Alasania continue to negotiate behind the scenes. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: The removal of cells from Freedom Square and along Rustaveli Avenue was a positive step but its larger significance, remains unclear. Alasania went further in his statements for dialogue than he had previously and is continuing to distance himself from the rest of the non-parliamentary opposition. While his comments infuriated Burjanadze and others, Alasania may have found some political wiggle room. Those still fully committed to protests value the facade of unity above all else, and have been measured in their public criticism of his recent moves. The incident with the police on May 28 failed to galvanize the public as some non-parliamentary leaders undoubtedly had hoped. The small, uneventful weekend rallies indicate that while the non-parliamentary opposition can bring 40-50,000 to the streets for a holiday rally, daily support continues to dwindle. The quiet Alasania-Bakradze talks seem to be making some modest headway which is encouraging. We will continue to support and encourage this and any wider opportunity at dialogue. End Comment.

Rallies Small - Cells Removed

¶3. (C) Only 1500 rallied May 29 to hear Levan Gachechiladze condemn western diplomats for indifference. He called on diplomats to make concrete statements about the crisis in Georgia instead of repeating only one word - dialogue. Gachechiladze went on to say that protests actions in front of western embassies were being discussed. May 30 saw an

equally small crowd; no major statements nor notable events occurred. Embassy observers reported 400-500 protesters milling around the afternoon of May 31 with intermittent speeches being delivered. Cells were removed late May 31/early June 1 in Freedom Square and placed on a large truck. Protest leaders had earlier indicated that the cells would be placed in front of Parliament but instead, moved them to an unknown location. Traffic on Freedom Square is moving, and much of Rustaveli Avenue has also been cleared, but cells remain in front of an around Parliament. The non-parliamentary opposition announced its intention to picket the Mayor's office June 1, and to picket Parliament on June 2 to purportedly disrupt a planned plenary session. (Embassy Comment: Per Speaker Bakradze there is no such planned session. The non-parliamentary opposition apparently started this rumor to subsequently declare some sort of victory in blocking this non-event. End Comment.) The non-parliamentary opposition also issued a joint statement blaming the GoG for "provocation" and initiating violence on May 28. The non-parliamentary opposition called for all police to be uniformed and said that the "Saakashvili regime was purposefully leading the country towards chaos and bloodshed."

Alasania Moves Further Away

14. (C) Alasania made an announcement May 30 that his soon-to-be-formed political party would not participate in the ongoing rallies, but would protest on occasion for specific reasons or events. Alasania dismissed critics of engaging in dialogue by explaining that the negotiations and protests were complementary of one another. Alasania said

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that early elections should be the goal of the negotiations, but demurred when asked whether he meant presidential or parliamentary. He said he was open to discuss advanced local elections as the GoG had proposed, but said he did not think it should take more than a few months to create the proper environment for elections in whatever form they would take. Beselia criticized the move saying that negotiations should only take place on the issue of Saakashvili's resignation, but that Alasania was free to pursue negotiations "without having the mandate of my party". Burjanadze reiterated that negotiations with the GoG were pointless.

Khaindrava Unloads on the Ambassador

15. (C) Former minister Goga Khaindrava sharply criticized the Ambassador saying that "(s)ponsors of this government, like the U.S. Ambassador, have to reconsider who they are siding with .. the U.S. Ambassador plays an extremely negative role. He tarnishes the image of America. Time will come when his deeds will become a topic of scrutiny. The U.S. Ambassador knows that there are criminals in the government. He knows that Vano (Merabishvili, Minister of the Interior) is a criminal, that there's corruption at the highest levels of the Georgian government and that Misha is a lunatic. Despite all this, the U.S. Ambassador tries to keep this madman in power. This shows that he (Ambassador Tefft) has no interest whatsoever in the democratic development of Georgia. Instead he has very sinister and incomprehensible interests. Those interests may yield extremely negative results for Georgia's statehood. The reason I have so many criticisms of America is that the U.S. has always been the cornerstone of democracy and the greatest hope for all who fight authoritarianism all over the world. But I doubt it is the case anymore. I know that Russia is the empire of evil, but the current position of the U.S. Ambassador raises many question marks for me."

Bakradze - Alasania Talking

16. (C) Speaker of Parliament David Bakradze told the Ambassador June 1 that private talks were ongoing with

Alasania. He said that Alasania's statement was welcome, but expressed some confusion as to why members of Alasania's team were still attending protests. Bakradze indicated that the GoG was working on harmonizing their five point proposal with the non-parliamentary opposition's six point proposal to move negotiations forward. Bakradze said that he would like to see a set date to begin negotiations, but also stressed that the GoG was prepared to be patient and had no plans to remove the "cells" or break up the protests. Bakradze detailed to the Ambassador that strong disagreements were emerging among the non-parliamentary opposition in their private discussions. Bakradze mentioned that a significant point of debate was still whether to escalate or moderate the protests and that the group was still having trouble potentially choosing a single leader to represent the group.

TEFFT